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Marcus A. McCorison

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AMERICAN ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY

185 Salisbury Street, Worcester, Massachusetts 01609-1634 U.S.A.

13 August 1985

RECEIVED
AUG 20 1985
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Dear Senator Pell:

Enclosed, you will find copies of correspondence I have had in the last few days with Senator Hatch. I hope that you will find it of interest and that you find some merit in my response to Senator Hatch's contention that NEH has a different mission than the Department of Education, which opinion he seems not to share.

With best wishes and thanks for your interest and help.

Sincerely yours,

Marcus A. McCorison
Director and Librarian

The Honorable Claiborne Pell
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

M:P
enclosures



American Antiquarian Society

185 SALISBURY STREET
WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS, 01609, U. S. A.

August 13, 1985

Dear Senator Hatch:

Thank you for your letter of August 9th in response to my earlier letter concerning the state of the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the search for a new chairman as well as for suitable citizens to serve on its national advisory council.

I take very much to heart your comments concerning the role of teachers of humane studies in our public schools and colleges. In fact, I delivered a talk on that subject at the annual meeting of the American Council of Learned Societies some months ago. I enclose a copy of my talk, herewith. I agree that many teachers in the secondary schools and in the colleges have not performed their duty to our liking and that many academics have narrow points of view - a situation which does not encourage an appreciation of the humanities amongst young people or adults who are not initiates.

However, I believe that it is an error to assume that, on a very limited budget, the National Endowment for the Humanities can fulfill a role which the United States Department of Education has failed to sustain. I am sure that the Congress did not intend that the National Endowment for the Humanities would become involved in the teaching of the humanities at the high school or college level. Rather, NEH is charged with the encouragement of the study of the humanities through inspired leadership of lay people (through state programs) and from teachers and scholars who, from time to time, turn back to the sources of knowledge and of our common heritage to refresh their minds, to learn new things about their chosen field, and to engage their intellects with writers and talkers (past and present) in collegial situations. In fact, an institution such as my own - the American Antiquarian Society - exists solely to do just that. Students, lay people, senior scholars, all meet here to work over the source materials that reveal the history and nature of our country. NEH plays a major role in enabling this institution, for example, to better fulfill its function as a source for humane learning.

I think it is splendid that Bill Bennett took the lead in calling for a renewed involvement in "classic" literature of all sorts. More leaders like him are needed in our public and parochial schools at all levels, as well as on college and university campuses, for I believe that the citizens of our

nation are caught, at present, in a downward spiral of materialism, secularization, and fragmentation of our society. That trend, which has been going on since World War II, can hardly be laid at the door of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Rather, it must be laid at the door of every person and institution, private or governmental, in our country. Thus, we see that students choose "practical" courses that will result in jobs, not learning; and that teachers or scholars opt for trendy topics or write jargon to attain tenure, not understanding; but, I doubt that NEH is a factor in campus politics or that single-handedly NEH can change the attitudes of American youth.

I believe that NEH earns its keep and makes a positive contribution to the nation by encouraging study in the disciplines which make up the humanities. That is best done, with limited resources, by reaching people who are going to reach multitudes of individuals in all kinds of settings. NEH makes available funds to give all kinds of readers access to the written record of mankind in libraries as diverse as the New York Public Library or Tusculum College. NEH programs for cataloguing and preservation of books and manuscripts are essential to the promotion of teaching and learning. NEH teaches through enabling good books to be written by inspired writers, improving the knowledge of committed teachers, funding exhibitions at libraries or museums, and by encouraging other means to share learning. That great mission should not be altered on the supposition that NEH (on a budget of \$140,000,000) can revolutionize classrooms from Maine to Hawaii.

I close by thanking you for your deep concern about the future of our nation and for the ways in which NEH can best serve our country.

With best wishes,

Sincerely yours,



Marcus A. McCofison
Director and Librarian

The Honorable Orrin G. Hatch
United States Senate
135 Russell State Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

MAMCC/mtb

Enc.

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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

COMMITTEES:
JUDICIARY
LABOR AND HUMAN
RESOURCES
SMALL BUSINESS
BUDGET
OFFICE OF TECHNOLOGY
ASSESSMENT

August 9, 1985

Mr. Marcus A. McCorison
American Antiquarian Society
185 Salisbury Street
Worcester, Massachusetts 01609

Dear Mr. McCorison:

Thank you for your thoughtful comments and I share your concern about the future of NEH. Since you have been open and have shared your concerns with me, I would like to share some of my impressions and concerns about NEH and its direction with you.

If you recall, the authorizing language of the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965, in its Declaration of Purpose, Section 2 (3), makes the statement that "democracy demands wisdom and vision in its citizens." As you do, I share this commitment by Congress to educational excellence in the arts and the humanities.

Furthermore, the authorizing legislation for NEH, in particular, Section 7 (c)(1), states that the chairman is authorized to develop a program for the "promotion of progress" in the humanities as well as for the promotion of "scholarship." This language authorizes a dual program; and, as chairman of the authorizing Senate committee, it is my duty to ensure that the dual nature of congressional intent for NEH programs be followed.

However, from a report by the past chairman, now Secretary of Education, William J. Bennett, humanities programs apparently are not making "progress." Last November, while chairman of NEH, Secretary Bennett issued a report, "To Reclaim A Legacy," in which he detailed the steady decline of humanities enrollments in our nation's colleges and universities. Secretary Bennett stated that since 1970 the number of majors in English has declined by 57 percent, in philosophy by 41 percent, in history by 62 percent, and in modern languages by 50 percent. This trend is alarming. The future strength of our democracy depends a great deal on the extent to which our youth learn to value and appreciate our rich heritage. Again, the Declaration of Purpose for NEH recognizes that a "democracy demands wisdom and vision in its citizens." I believe this statement means that all citizens, not just those in the academic community, should have a chance to gain the "wisdom" and "vision" that the study of the humanities can impart.

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Part of the decline in enrollments in the humanities courses seems to be caused by the failure of scholars and research-oriented professors to introduce students and the public to the simple, natural appeal that these disciplines have held for ages. Some critics claim that many academics have gone to the extreme of teaching the humanities as science, dissecting in tiresome detail our literature, history, and language. As Wordsworth reputedly said, scientists must "murder to dissect." I do not want academics, in their quest for needed scholarship, to unwittingly "murder" the humanities for the uninitiated. Apparently, when professors and teachers use a highly analytical approach to teaching, many students lose interest in the humanities. On this subject, I have enclosed a copy of a letter I sent to the National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History. For further reference, I refer you to an essay, "The Great Conversation," by Robert M. Hutchins, editor of the Great Books of the Western World. In this essay Mr. Hutchins makes this cogent observation:

We have built up around the "classics" such an atmosphere of pedantry, we have left them so long to the scholarly dissectors, that we think of them as incomprehensible to the ordinary man to whom they were originally addressed.

I am concerned about the fact that our young people are not enrolling in humanities courses in our colleges and universities. I am also concerned that our educational practices for teaching the humanities may not only be ineffective but perhaps are turning our young people away from the study of the humanities.

Regardless of the possible causes for the decline of the study of the humanities disciplines, we certainly could agree that some change is essential if the study of these disciplines is to be revived. On June 20, the Subcommittee on Education, Arts and Humanities held a hearing for the purpose of reauthorizing NEH. At this hearing, Mr. John Agresto, acting chairman of both NEH and the National Council on the humanities, reported that, despite twenty years of effort by NEH to promote the study of the Humanities, the humanities today "occupy only a peripheral place in the curriculum" of the nation's schools. Furthermore, Mr. Agresto reported that some scholars "turn out books and articles that are trivial and obscure" and that some public programming is "superficial, boring, and faddish."

From my perspective in the Senate, there appears to be mounting evidence that NEH needs new leadership. In my

opinion, Mr. Edward Curran is the right person at the right time for this job. The criticisms I have heard against his nomination are not only unfair but unwise if we are to get young Americans studying the humanities again. Mr. Curran's twenty-five years in the secondary education community can be an excellent complement to the expertise in higher education of Secretary Bennett. As you know, Secretary Bennett successfully brought into focus many NEH programs and started the revival of the classics, and I believe Mr. Curran will build on Secretary Bennett's good work. Furthermore, Mr. Curran's experience as an educator gives him the skills needed to work with parents and the public whom NEH must certainly enlist if it is to successfully improve the status and condition of the humanities.

You are correct in noting that Mr. Curran's experience is different from that of previous chairmen of NEH. It is my understanding that previous chairmen have had extensive experience in post-secondary education. However, from my understanding of the purposes of NEH, there is no reason to assume that persons with experience in the post-secondary community should necessarily be the only ones considered for this very important office. NEH was created for the benefit of all Americans, not for any single constituency. Furthermore, no constituency with legitimate ties to the humanities should have their members excluded from consideration for this national post. I believe persons with extensive service and experience in the primary or secondary education systems are as worthy of consideration as persons from the post-secondary system. I firmly believe that NEH will in the long run be best served by leadership that reflects the pluralistic nature of our educational system, of our private enterprise system, and of our people at large.

I believe that NEH today needs a person at its helm who has broad experience both with the humanities and with people. After all, most of our culture's great literature was written for the general public. If we are to reclaim the legacy that the great writers left to the public, I believe that we are obliged to return the federal administration of humanities' support activities to a leader with general rather than specialized expertise and experience. I believe Mr. Curran possesses the leadership skills worthy of this very important agency, and he is a proven administrator of exceptional ability.

In conclusion, Ernest Boyer, President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching has summed up the current crisis our humanities' disciplines face:

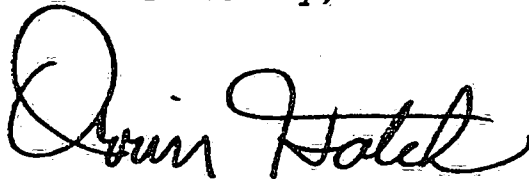
August 9, 1985

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Our twentieth century has seen a crippling of the human spirit. Fragmentation abounds. Students are directed to one narrow branch of knowledge, thereby losing a larger vision. Even the arts have become so separated that students of music, or painting, or literature fail to see connections. Humanities students specialize in "periods" - Renaissance, Baroque, Modern - and are hardly conversant with traditions outside those little boxes.

I have met with Mr. Curran and discussed with him the importance of NEH to the health and viability of our democracy. I believe that he is the leader the nation needs now at this very important agency, and I would hope that we all could support him in the important task of reclaiming our heritage. I sincerely appreciate your letter and hope I have answered some of your concerns. Please feel free to contact me again if I can help further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Orrin Hatch". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Orrin G. Hatch
United States Senator

OGH/rj

Enclosure